

my excuses to Lady X&rborough. I shan't go upstairs. I shall go home. I must go home/*

"AH right, Dorian. I dare say I shall see you to-morrow tea-time/ The Duchess is coming."

*kI will try to be there, Harry," he said, leaving the room.

As he drove'bad: to his own house he was conscious that the sense of terror he thought he had strangled had come back to him. Lord Henry's casual questioning had made him lose his nerve for the moment, and he wanted his nerve still.

Things that \vere dangerous had to be destroyed. He winced.

He hated the idea of even touching them.

Yet it had to be done. He realized that, and when he had locked the door of his library, he opened the secret press into

which he had thrust Basil Hallward's coat and bag. A huge

fire was blazing. He piled another log on it.

The smell of the singeing clothes and burning leather was horrible.

It took him three-quarters of an hour to consume everything.

At the end he felt faint and sick, and having lit some Algerian pastilles

in a pierced copper brazier, he bathed his hands and forehead

with a cool musk-scented vinegar.

Suddenly he started. His eyes grew strangely bright,

and he gnawed nervously at his under-lip. Between two of the

windows stood a large Florentine cabinet, made out of ebony,

and inlaid with ivory and blue lapis. He watched it as though

it were a thing that could fascinate and make afraid,

as though it held something that he longed for and yet almost loathed.

His breath quickened. A mad craving came over him.

He lit a cigarette and then threw it away. His eyelids drooped

till the long fringed lashes almost touched his cheek.

But he still watched the cabinet. At last he got up from the sofa on

which he had been lying, went over to it, and, having unlocked

it, touched some hidden spring. A triangular drawer passed

slowly out. His fingers moved instinctively towards it, dipped

in, and closed on something. It was a small Chinese box of

black and gold-dust lacquer, elaborately wrought, the sides

patterned with curved waves, and the silken cords hung with

round crystals and tasselled in plaited metal threads.

He opened it. Inside was a green paste, waxy in lustre, the odour

curiously heavy and persistent.

He hesitated for some moments, with a strangely immobile

smile upon his face. Then shivering, though the atmosphere

of the room was terribly hot, he drew himself up, and glanced

at the clock. It was twenty minutes to twelve. He put the